

KIM

Then, fingering his rosary, he turned toward the Museum.

‘What is your caste? Where is your house? Have you come far?’ Kim asked.

‘I came by Kulu — from beyond the Kailas — but what know you? From the hills where’ — he sighed — ‘the air and water are fresh and cool.’

‘Aha! Khitai (a Chinaman),’ said Abdullah proudly. Fook Shing had once chased him out of his shop for spitting at the joss above the boots.

‘Pahari (a hill man),’ said little Chota Lal.

‘Ay, child — a hill man from hills thou’lt never see. Didst hear of Bhotiyal (Tibet)? I am no Khitai, but a Bhotiya (Tibetan), since you must know — a lama — or, say a guru in your tongue.’

‘A guru from Tibet,’ said Kim. ‘I have not seen such a man. They be Hindus in Tibet, then?’

‘We be followers of the Middle Way, living in peace in our lamasseries, and I go to see the Four Holy Places before I die. Now do you, who are children, know as much as I do who am old.’ He smiled benigantly on the boys.

‘Hast thou eaten?’

He fumbled in his bosom and drew forth a worn wooden begging-bowl. The boys nodded. All priests of their acquaintance begged.

‘I do not wish to eat yet.’ He turned his head like an old tortoise in the sunlight. ‘Is it true that